

Hello, my name is Jeff Hudgins. I am a real estate broker from East Lansing. I thank you for the opportunity to come before your committee and speak on the matter of eminent domain.

I am a firm believer in protecting property rights of private citizens. Public policy should not allow acquisition thru condemnation and eminent domain of private property for private uses.

Any caveat or exception to this principal such as the present exception for 'BLIGHT' has the potential of allowing local officials or bureaucrats, or those with a strong personal or financial interest to manipulate the law and take private land for another private use.

Instead of working with local land owners regarding a concept for redevelopment and reaching consensus and suitable compensation, using the blight option as it presently exists in the law gives government the option of going back door to gain tax advantages and achieve their redevelopment plans unilaterally.

Some here today may be familiar with the city of East Lansing's effort to redevelop 35 acres of land bordering the Red Cedar River south of Grand River. This 35 acres, known as the East Village Area is heavily populated by college students in apartments and houses. Those businesses which are there primarily cater to students.

Let me give you an example of how East Lansing is using the BLIGHTED feature of the law to attempt a redevelopment of private land for private purposes.

In an editorial page rebuttal to a Lansing State Journal article addressing the City's handling of blight, The East Lansing City Manager stated that the City was taking advantage of criteria established by public Act 344 of 1945 to determine that the proposed area was considered blighted.

He cited criteria including physical deterioration of structures and public facilities, improper arrangements of lots and endangerment to municipal welfare due to past civil disorder in the area.

These may all be attributes of a blighted area as defined by a law written 60 years ago. The use however by this local municipality is designed to set in motion a private taking of real property for private redevelopment.

Let me present another side of this 35 acre area known as East Village that paints an entirely different picture of what is happening in East Lansing. Based on an informal survey of landlords in the area occupancy is virtually 100%. Hardly what you would expect in a blighted area!!

Speaking as a property owner in this area I will attest that upgrades made to our property over the past five years to conform to City standards include remodeled

baths, a new kitchen, a new roof, fresh paint inside and out, a newly paved parking lot and more.

I am not the only property owner that has taken these steps to conform to city standards. How disingenuous it is to make the claim that there is physical deterioration of structures when the city controls what they dictate being improved. Similarly how can a claim be made of deteriorating public facilities when taxes that the city collects are not directed to making necessary public improvements?

Civil disorder incidents have occurred in this area. They have also occurred in numerous other areas of the city with just about as much frequency. But the coup de gras for this BLIGHTED area in East Lansing is that every single year since I purchased our property in 1988 the property taxes have increased!!

I have to ask? With 100% occupancy and an increasing property tax base, does this sound like a BLIGHTED area to you?

I am certain that EL is not the only municipality taking advantage of the law as it is written to achieve their purposes of redevelopment. I would simply suggest that we need to address this issue of BLIGHT as it is presently written in the law.

My personal opinion is that if the state law dictates that you may not take private property for another private redevelopment purpose then there should not be any

exceptions. If it is sound public policy it does not require a "BUT IF" clause for blight.

Neither SB 693, nor Senate Joint Resolution E as currently written address blight. Please amend the language in these new bills before passage so that blight is clearly defined. The law must be written in such a way as to preclude local municipalities from gaining a financial advantage by invoking the blighted designation when it comes to taking private property and redeveloping it for a private use.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

**Jeff Hudgins
Hudgins Realty**